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The seven words from the Cross, a Lenten exercise [in ...

John Davies
Mereweather

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THE
Seven Words from the Cross

A LENTEN EXERCISE

BY THE
REV. J. D. MEREWETHER, B.A. OXON.

CHAPLAIN AT VENICE



LONDON
J. T. HAYES, 17 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN
1880

Dedicated
TO
A DEAR FRIEND
LONG ABSENT
YET EVER PRESENT

PALAZZO CONTARINI, VENICE
27th August 1879

THE
SEVEN WORDS FROM THE CROSS.

A LENTEN EXERCISE.

Scene—CALVARY.

Jesus Christ upon the Cross between the Two Thieves.
Above Him Chorus of Angels. Jesus Christ pronounces
the Seven Words or Sentences as He hangs upon the Cross,
and the Angels sing their comments on those Words.

THE SEVEN WORDS ARE AS FOLLOWS :—

From Third to Sixth Hour, before the darkness came on.

FIRST WORD.

**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they
do.—S. Luke xxiii. 34.**

SECOND WORD.

**Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me
in Paradise.—S. Luke xxiii. 43.**

THIRD WORD.

**Behold thy Son! behold thy Mother!—
S. John xix. 26, 27.**

From Sixth to Ninth Hour, after the darkness came on.

FOURTH WORD.

**My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?—
S. Matthew xxvii. 46.**

FIFTH WORD.

I thirst.—S. John xix. 28.

SIXTH WORD.

It is finished.—S. John xix. 30.

SEVENTH WORD.

**Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.—
S. Luke xxiii. 46.**

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

Prologue.

Ecce Deus ! Very God !

He who in the dawn of Time
Culled with handiwork sublime
Errant aimless nebulae

Floating on yon ether-sea :
Then kneaded up the fiery mass
To form of beauty, even as

Skilful potter moulds his clay ;
Till laughed with joy the nascent earth
Throbbing in its wondrous birth,
Proud to prove its primal day.

Then launched it whirling into space,
Jubilant to run its race
Jocund with its brother peers,
Circling circling evermore
In that sea without a shore,
Home eternal of the spheres.

Who then did draw the new-born Light
From the murky womb of night ;
And did clothe Earth's rocky floor
With grass and herb in wondrous store,
Forest wide, fruit-bearing tree,
Wood-crowned height and verdant lea.

Ecce Deus ! This is He
Hanging on the Mystic Tree !
Ever sing His praises we !

All the moving things that be,
Sprang to life at His command ;
Fowl in heaven, and fish in sea,
Fresh from their Creator's hand.

Many a mighty beast that fills
Marshy coverts' undergrowth ;
Cattle on a thousand hills,
Creatures creeping on the earth ;
These did people every land
Moulded by the Master's hand.

Then the Ancient One of Days,
Working out His own behest,
Man from teeming dust did raise
Ere He took His Sabbath rest.

To perfect this wondrous whole
Breath and image did He lend ;
Thus became a Living Soul
Man—Creation's aim and end !

Mighty Workman ! Mighty Master !
Soul of Nature ! Where art Thou ?
Can it be that Thou enshrinest
Every attribute divinest,
In that blood-bedabbled form,
In that anguish-stricken brow ?

Ecce Deus ! This is He
Hanging on the Mystic Tree !
Ever sing His praises we !

Ecce Homo ! Very Man !
He who in Time's fulness came,
Woman-born, to suffer shame,
Death, and anguish here below,
Parrying thus the fatal blow
Aimed at man through Eve the Mother,
By that Heaven-discarded brother
In a serpent's form appearing ;
Satan, who, his God forswearing,
Roameth through Earth's garden ever,
Lion-like in search of prey.

Ecce Homo ! This is He
Hanging on the Mystic Tree !
Ever sing His praises we !

He who with divinest lore,
Like a loving teacher bore
Erring children of the night
Out of darkness into light ;
Who with wonders manifold
Ushered in Messiah's reign
By the Prophets long foretold,
Prince of Peace His peaceful name.

~~Here He~~ ! This is ~~He~~
Hanging on the Mystic Tree !
Ever sing His praises we !

He, who ere He left His own,
That they should not dwell alone,
Gave His Flesh and Blood to be,
By a wondrous alchemy,

Mystic Bread and Mystic Wine,
For their Nutriment Divine ;
Manna in life's wilderness ;
Solace in their souls' distress ;
Water in a thirsty land,
Welling from the Maker's hand :
So that now for aye will be
That Creation's work be done,
God, Christ and Man in being Three
United in a Perfect One.

Ecce Homo ! This is He
Hanging on the Mystic Tree !
Ever sing His praises we !

But break we off ; for see, the heaving breast,
And lips half parted, of the suffering God,

Do show He yearns to speak. Gather we now
The manna from His mouth, meekly attent.

Jesus Christ utters the First Word—

**Father, forgive them ; for they know not what
they do.**

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

No water can quench love, nor floods can drown :
So sang the Eastern sage, great David's son.
O Love divine of Christ, surpassing thought !
The great Redeemer in His agony,
Front pressed by thorns, and members pierced by
nails,
From the stern pulpit of the cross implores
Forgiveness for His crucifying foes.
For He, in His All-Sapience, fully knows

That this world's god, the cunning snake of old,
Who with an apple the frail Eve misled,
The hearts has hardened of this erring race,
Their eyes, too, blinded. So of sight bereft,
Poor, blind, and weak, they know not what they do.
As once upon the Galilean Mount He preached
' Bless them that curse you ; love your enemies ;
Do good to them that hate you, always praying
For them that grossly injure you ; ' so now
Amid the sore unrest of Calvary's Mount
He puts these words in practice, strongly striving
To deprecate God's wrath, and draw from Heaven
Love to His haters ; pardon to His foes.

Jesus Christ utters the Second Word—

**Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with
me in Paradise.**

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

O words of joy for yonder bleeding form
Writhing in anguish justly merited,
Yon twelfth hour convert to the fold of Christ !
Effort supreme of God's abounding grace,
Ever abounding where sin most abounds !
In one brief moment, from the deeps of hell
To Heaven's pure height the tortured culprit soars,
Intent amid the pastures of the blest
With his Redeemer hand in hand to walk,
Where God is visible to unveiled eyes.
The dying saint has his salvation worked
From step to step with rapid onward course.

First he rebukes his hardened railing mate ;
And then, confessing all his past misdeeds,
Loudly proclaims the innocence of Christ.
His ardent faith still holds its onward way
More ardent faith producing, till at last
Springs from his lips the supplication, ' Lord,
Into Thy Kingdom when Thou comest King,
Remember me.' And so to him is given
Immediate paradise ! More blest is he
Than erring Peter, who at hour of need
Denied his Lord, and said he knew Him not.

Jesus Christ utters the Third Word—

Behold thy Son ! behold thy Mother !

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

And now the dying God with steadfast gaze
Looks at the weeping group hard by the cross,

The holy Four, three Maries and that John
On whose beloved breast he wont to lean :
And to His Mother, through whose martyred heart
The thought-revealing sword was piercing sore,
Widowed and lonely, of her all bereft,
Utters these solemn words : ' Behold thy son ;
In John, my loved one, recognise myself.'
And then, His wearied eye half dimmed with pain,
He turns to him who from the Patmian shore
Prophetic visions of a mystic world
Is fore-ordained to publish to the Church ;
And says, ' Behold thy Mother, thine as mine !'
O glorious privilege to have the charge
Of God's own Mother, by the Son consigned !
Soon shall we see them speeding to his home,
A sainted son a sainted Mother leading ;

And future ages shall behold Her hailed
Queen of all queens amid the queenly host.

But what is this funereal pall that lowers
Upon the darkened earth? Has the sun fled
From his accustomed course, aghast to see
A Deity expiring? As of old
Darkness, thick darkness wrapped the Egyptian
coasts,

Palpable darkness, motion interdicting,
Sign of the steadfast wrath of Israel's God
Against His people's enemies ; so now
The selfsame God o'er all the frightened earth
This sign portentous of His wrath doth pour
Upon this recreant host, who do to death
His own begotten, Just One without spot.

Jesus Christ utters the Fourth Word—

My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me ?

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

Sainted example to the human race !
Whose footprints must be followed step by step
Throughout the irksome labyrinth of life,
By those who set at nought terrestrial things
And gladly to perfection would attain !
Through all the varying phases of man's thoughts
And words and acts this Blameless One has passed ;
And sounded every depth of human joys
And human woes, and faith, and doubts, unscathed.
The lights and shades that light and cloud the soul
In alternation swift and constant change,

Like showers and sunshine in earth's early spring,
Thou Arch-Type hast made trial of them all !
And this the grief supreme more dire than death,
Twin grief with that of sad Gethsemane,
Whilst lay by sleep enchained the drowsy Three,
And blood-sweat oozed from out Thy bleeding
pores ;

This clouding of God's face, eclipse of light,
Withdrawal of the Father of all Lights—
Thou now art called to suffer. Satan now
Shoots his last shaft, and tempting cries, 'Despair;
Thy Father hath forsaken Thee. So die
As orphans die away from parents' eyes ;
Friendless, alone, bereft of God and man.'
But this last shaft hath missed its destined mark :
The dying Saviour through that thickest veil

Still sees His God with eyes of constant faith,
Watching with loving look this last attempt
To vex His Holy One with sharpest doubts—
Still in His mortal agony beholds
His God as ever, but with face half hidden
To test His spotless soul. Then, then, at last,
Temptation overcome and Tempter foiled,
In piteous tone of sad remonstrance meek
Breaks from His lips that bitterest of all cries
That man can ever cry, 'My God ! My God !
Thou Ever-Present ! In this hour of need,
Why hast Thou thus forsaken me ?'
He feels His presence, though His sight be dim.
Triumphant Saint ! Now hold Thine onward course ;
The Evil One is baffled, and no more
Shall vex Thy purest soul with doubts and fears.

Jesus Christ utters the Fifth Word—

I thirst.

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

Fountain of living waters ! Dost Thou thirst ?
Life-giving stream in earth's drear wilderness,
To drink of which absolves from further thirst !
This is Thy last of tortures save death's pang.
For many a weary hour Thy patient form
Wasted by scourging, hurrying to and fro,
The want of food and drink, and soothing sleep,
Unmurmuring has borne all. And now at last
Wound-thirst, of thirsts the direst thirst of all,
Assaults Thy human frame; and Thy parched lips,
Fulfilling Scripture, stammer forth, 'I thirst.'
All ye that pass, does this concern ye not ?

What sorrow can be likened unto this?
Such is the price of man's redemption !

Jesus Christ utters the Sixth Word—

It is finished.

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

The strife is o'er ; the Passion's end and aim
Fulfilled in all perfection ! Finished now
The theme of the old Prophets ! Finished now
The preaching of God's Holy One to men !
Drained to the dregs has been the bitter cup
That could not be removed ; and those dead
In sins, by this death die no more ; and thus
Has the dread hour of darkness come and gone.
O suffering Saviour, finished are Thy woes !

Triumphing Martyr ! Doff Thy pilgrim's garb
Mortality, and enter into rest !

No insults, strifes, or wounds shall vex Thee more ;

No crown of thorns, or robe of mockery ;

No mob's fierce roar, or sneer of Pharisee.

And finished, too, by Thy great Sacrifice,

This one Oblation of Thy body and blood—

The innumerable victims of the ancient Law,

Thou Anti-Type of Shadows of the Past !

The Cross is now the Altar ; and the Lamb,

As well as High Priest, is the Son of God

Pure and unblemished ; whilst the fire by which

The Holocaust is kindled, is the Love

Which burns so fiercely in the God-Man's heart.

The fruit of this great deed is sure to be

Thorough atonement of man's blackest sins ;

Full reconciliation with offended God.
O Blessed Cross, once infamous ! Thou art
The battle-field on which has now been fought
The great fight of the evil powers and good,
The object of the strife being man's lost soul.
Long has it lasted, e'en from Adam's fall,
When Satan conquered the too credulous Eve,
And tainted to the core all Adam's sons.
For Adam fell ; having free will to fall
Or stand, he chose to fall with all his race ;
So all the world was Satan's by fair right.
The God of Mercy acts not without justice
E'en to the wicked who blaspheme His name.
Thus all lay dead in trespasses and sins,
And gloom primeval brooded o'er the world.
Then comes the Son of God and pleads for man,

And offers to assume the human shape,
And suffer human woes, and die for man,
If by such act God's justice be appeased.
And God accepts the proffered Sacrifice,
And leaves His Son to die that man may live.
See on the Cross full satisfaction given
For Adam's guilt and all his sinful brood !
Vanquished is Satan, and the Heir of all
Has thus won back His long lost heritage.

As from the sleeping Adam's side emerged
The beauteous Eve ; so from this dying form
Of Jesus, springs His daughter and His spouse
The Church, fair Mother of His myriad sons,
Spotless, unwrinkled, free from sin and stain.
Thus all is triumph ; and the lordly Cross
Becomes the great highway 'twixt earth and heaven.

Jesus Christ utters the Seventh Word—

Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

All now is finished ; prophecies fulfilled ;
Shadows become realities. Stern Law
For aye has melted into Christ's mild rule ;
That all most dead till now henceforth may live.
Made the Oblation, what remains to do ?
The Victim must resign His precious life !
And so the great God-Sacrifice exclaims,
With loudest voice, that none may fail to hear,
'O God, my Father, into Thy blest hands
My spirit I commend.' And so has passed
A glory from the earth ; a precious life

Outweighing all the millions of lives
That swarm upon the surface of the globe.

Now Nature travaileth in agony :
Black night becomes more black : with earthquake's
shock

The very rocks are rent ; the Temple's veil
Is reft in twain, even as a fragile toy
Wanted no more : the queasy-stomached graves
Vomit their ghastly dead, that shadow-like
Flit to and fro within yon holy walls.

But does this earthquake, rending of the rocks
And Temple's veil, this blackness, finish all ?
Is this dark scene of Calvary the last
That bears on man's redemption ? Nothing more ?
Nothing to come to quench our wail of woe ?

Epilogue.

Come, let us prophesy,
Moved by God's Spirit sure ;
Let us say what shall be
In the near Future.

On the third day from this,
Jesus shall rise again
From that dark tomb of His,
Spurning death's pain.

All who in Adam die,
Bound by sin's iron bands,
Now live eternally,
Raised by Christ's saving hands.

Hitherto darkness rife,
Death and mortality ;
Henceforward light and life,
Endless vitality.

Hitherto on the ground,
Groping their weary way ;
Henceforward upward bound,
Toward the eternal day.

Short shall His sojourn be
On the drear earth below ;
Borne on a cloud shall He
Enter the ether's glow.

Joyously leading
Captivity captive,
Shall He for ever live,
Anxiously pleading,

On the right hand of God,
For His beloved ones
Scourged by sin's heavy rod.

And that His children,
Sheep of His pasture,
Orphans might never be,
Never lack moisture :
So on the Pentecost,
'Mid the wind's rushing,
Shall on the saintly host
Flame forth the cloven tongues,
Signs of the Holy Ghost
Through His Church gushing ;
Light-giving Comforter,
Spirit of Truth !

And of this Spirit
All who are born again,
Sure shall inherit
God's Kingdom in Heaven.

Glorious Effusion !
Deity's Breath !
Bright Palingenesis,
Mocking at Death !

Come shall the time when
Sin shall no longer be,
Vanquished and crushed by the
Victim of Calvary.

Come shall the time when
Death shall have passed away ;

Death with his mighty ones,
Sorrow and pain.

Come shall the time when
Hell shall no longer be ;
All its flames quenched by the
Waters of Life.

Come shall the time when
Time shall have passed away ;
Time the Devourer,
Worn shred of Eternity.

When shall sound Earth's passing-bell,
We, Heaven's first-born, straight shall see
Time and Death, and Sin and Hell,
All absorbed in Deity.



